

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL
RECEIVED
APR - 2 1996
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

In the Matter of)
)
Closed Captioning and Video) CC Docket No. 95.176
Description of Video)
Programming)

RESPONSE OF
THE NATIONAL BLACK DEAF ADVOCATES

I. Introduction

The National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) hereby submits response to the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Notice of Inquiry (NOI) on closed captioning and video description. The NBDA is the first and largest consumer organization of the deaf or hard of hearing people of color established in the United States. NBDA was founded in 1982 by Black deaf leaders who were concerned that deaf or hard of hearing African American were not adequately represented in leadership and policy decision-making activities affecting their lives.

NBDA is a nonprofit organization with 17 chapters in addition to direct and associate members. The 17 member chapters include Washington, DC; Cleveland, OH; Philadelphia, PA; New York, NY; Atlanta, GA; Detroit, MI; Chicago, IL; Nashville, TN; Memphis, TN; Oakland, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Rochester, NY; Little Rock, AR; Indianapolis, IN; Dallas, TX; Jackson, MS and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. NBDA with over 1,000 members, serves as a national advocates for thousands of deaf and hard of hearing African Americans.

At the outset, the NBDA wishes to commend the FCC on its decision to initiate the instant proceeding to assess the current availability, cost, and uses of closed captioning and video description. This NOI symbolizes the growing recognition by FCC and Congress on the need to promote full and equal access to video programming for all Americans. Because NBDA's expertise is necessarily limited to the provision of closed captioning of video programs, these comments are limited to the captioning issue. We would, however, like to note our strong support for comments and responses submitted in favor of Commission rules requiring video description of television programs on the behalf of the blind consumers.

Benefits of Closed Captioning

The Commission recognizes the dominant role television plays in our society and the NOI makes reference to the many hours that Americans watch television during the course of the day for both news and entertainment. Just as a hearing person derives little or no benefit from watching television with the volume off; a deaf or hard of hearing person derives little or no benefit from watching television with no captions.

Children

Nine out of ten deaf and hard of hearing children have hearing parents, and eight out of ten deaf and hard of hearing students are placed in public schools (cited). These children often are buffeted by isolation from communication at home and in school. Of the 28, 750,000 total black population in the United States, 4.2% or 1,200,000 are deaf and hard of

No. of Copies rec'd 0
List ABCDE

hearing. Of the 8,300,000 Black children ranging from age 3-17, 1.2% or 100,000 are deaf or hard of hearing. Black deaf and hard of hearing children are more likely than their white counterparts to be born and raised in a hearing and non-sign language family, thus, placed in a mainstream school. When surrounded by hearing individuals who lack sign language abilities, closed captioning serves as a major tool in alleviating isolation, providing entertainment and news as well as assisting in language development. For various reasons, Black parents of deaf children often fail to employ early intervention programs which leads to late exposure to language, which then results in a delay in the child's language development. Studies have shown that closed caption is an effective tool in language development and in teaching literacy skills for these young children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Cable Television

A frequent complaint of Black deaf and hard of hearing cable consumers is the lack of access to Black Entertainment Television (BET). In an early 1993 survey on closed caption availability within the cable industry, BET programs were 0.0% closed captioned. A more recent survey shows a slight improvement with BET providing closed caption for 4.78% of its program, a figure which is however strikingly low. BET is a very important network considering that the majority of its programs are educational and culturally based; therefore, it is grossly unfair that this segment of the Black community which has much to gain from this network lacks access.

Conclusion

NBDA thank the FCC for the opportunity to respond and share thoughts on captioning of video programming. We hope that this brief response will receive consideration and assist the carriers, providers, and producers of all programings to achieve their goal of reaching out to every individual in the United States of America.

Respectfully Submitted

Claudia Gordon
202-484-8238 TTY
202-651-5660 Voice/TTY

April 1, 1996